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ABSTRACT

Classroom assignments have limitations in their ability to encourage student learning, communication skills, and appreciation for the professional aspects of psychology as a science. This document emphasizes the value of teaching beyond the classroom by mentoring undergraduate student scholarship. It identifies many opportunities for students to publish and present in both student and professional forums, and presents pedagogical, personal, and professional benefits of such joint endeavors for students and faculty. The benefits for students presenting research include: (1) promoting creativity and critical thinking skills; (2) encouraging collaborative learning; (3) refining communication skills; and (4) developing feelings of competence and familiarity with the entire research process. Interviews with former American Psychological Association presidents and anecdotal reports by instructors who have mentored students reinforce the advantages of the mentor approach. Table 1 lists information about psychology journals that publish undergraduate students' scholarly work. (Contains 18 references.) (JDM)

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Teaching Beyond the Classroom: Mentoring Student Publications and Presentations

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Abstract

Classroom assignments have limitations for encouraging student learning, communication skills, and appreciation for the professional aspects of psychology as a science. This article emphasizes the value of teaching beyond the classroom by mentoring undergraduate student scholarship. We identify opportunities for publication and presentation in student and professional forums, as well as pedagogical, personal, and professional benefits of this joint endeavor. Interviews with former American Psychological Association presidents and anecdotal reports by instructors who have mentored students reinforce the advantages of such an approach.

Teaching Beyond the Classroom: Mentoring Student Publications and Presentations

Writing assignments are a staple of many psychology courses. Educators often expect students to prepare well-written applications of class material, reviews of existing literature, and reports of original research. Some of the benefits of these assignments to students include improved critical thinking, content specific knowledge, and written and spoken communication skills. Whereas rewrites (Dunn, 1994) and progressive writing assignments (Hemenover, Caster, & Mizumoto, 1999) provide increased opportunities for students to improve skills than manuscripts without revisions, most students view even these more involved assignments as a means to an end (i.e., a grade) versus an opportunity for skill building and professional development. This article testifies to the value of teaching beyond the classroom by mentoring student scholarship for professional publication or presentation.

Graduate students traditionally work directly and collaboratively with major professors on independent and faculty-driven research. Undergraduate faculty can easily transfer this mentoring model to similar relationships with their students, especially at universities and colleges without graduate programs. Student scholarship can take the form of creative insights into psychological concepts, literature reviews, and traditional research. Students can publish or present their scholarship in professional or student forums because both socialize students to the field of psychology as a science.

Opportunities

With the current emphasis on research leading to publication, one is not surprised to find that educators have established several journals devoted to the publication of undergraduate student research. Among these journals are the Journal of Psychological Inquiry (JPI), Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research (PCJUR), and The Journal of Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences (JPBS). Table 1 provides details regarding those journals. Smith (1999) gave an editor's informative perspective to educate students about submitting and revising manuscripts for possible publication in a student journal. Of

course, particularly high levels of meritorious student scholarship can and should be submitted to top-of-the-line professional journals.

We would also like to point out that there are a variety of local, state, regional, and national venues at which students can make presentations. Opportunities for presenting research locally include end-of-class poster and paper presentations (Gore & Camp, 1987; Baird, 1991), and department-wide paper reading and poster sessions (Rosenberg & Blount, 1988). A variant of these approaches involves collaboration with neighboring institutions for poster or paper sessions. Regional students' psychology conventions (see Smith & Davis, 1997, p. 17), and professional, regional, and national psychology conventions all provide outlets for varying levels of student scholarship.

At the undergraduate level, there are Web sites that supply information about student research conventions, including Psi Chi Regional Conventions <http://www.psichi.org/content/conventions/reg_conv.asp> and Other Conventions & Conferences <http://www.psichi.org/content/conventions/other_conv.asp>. The Society for the Teaching of Psychology also supports undergraduate research conferences by publishing conference summaries and information about persons to contact for additional information <http://www.jbu.edu/sbs/d2/URCon.html>.

Benefits

Having identified opportunities for student publication and presentation, we now discuss the benefits of such scholarship for students. Benefits for students presenting research include (a) promoting creativity and critical thinking skills (Addison, 1996; Hubbard & Ritchie, 1995), (b) encouraging collaborative learning, (c) refining communication skills (Dunn, 1996; Schapman, 1998), (d) developing enthusiasm for scholarly pursuits (Khersonskaya, 1998), and (e) developing feelings of competence and familiarity with the entire research process (Wolverton, 1998). Benefits for students submitting manuscripts for publication include the previously mentioned benefits for presenting research, as well as (a) refining formal written communication skills (Lawson &

Smith, 1996; Peden, 1991), (b) obtaining feedback from independent reviewers, and (c) enjoying the prospect for formal recognition for excellence in scientific investigation.

Scholarly investigation that leads to publication or presentation has the added benefit of making students more attractive to graduate or professional school admissions committees. Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, and Spiegel (1994) indicated the importance of such tangible accomplishments when they reported that research leading to a journal publication was the most important second-order criterion for admission to graduate school and that research leading to a convention presentation was the third most important second-order criterion.

In separate interviews, two former American Psychological Association (APA) presidents, Bill McKeachie (Miller & Ware, 1999) and Dick Suinn (Littrell, Schmidt, & Ahlum, 2000), described their experiences conducting research with and their views about benefits of scholarship for undergraduate students. McKeachie pointed out the advantages of acquiring skills for asking psychological questions and knowing how to use resources to get answers. He explained that students expand their writing and speaking skills from producing products of research. Finally, McKeachie pointed out that acquiring facility with APA style "forces you to think about what needs to be in a communication about research" (p. 47). Suinn described the peer relationship that can develop between students and faculty. He emphasized the pleasure of "going through a series of questions, designing something [and] finding out the answer" (p. 82). Suinn also pointed out that should the research fail to produce an answer, it can offer leads to fresh perspectives and directions.

Consistent with McKeachie and Suinn's accolades for undergraduate research, undergraduate faculty who regularly mentor student scholarship offered the following comments supporting the value of their efforts.

• "We post the papers as a concrete example that someone from our school could accomplish this goal. The postings also seem to work as an incentive. You can see some students take on the look, 'I want to do that.'"

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• "From talks with former students, who are established in graduate programs, I learned that preparing a manuscript for a student journal was the only writing task that realistically prepared them for the kind of writing/revision regime required to publish scientific articles."

• "Carol (fictitious name) was only a "C" student, but her motivation and interest in research energized her through the whole process. Because research fascinated her, after completing the Experimental Psychology course, she worked with me in an independent research course. She excelled in planning, conducting, and writing her research project. She presented her project orally at a convention. When she discovered the existence of a student journal, her motivation prompted her to submit her paper for publication. When her paper was published, Carol was extremely proud. She is now a manager with a major bank and is convinced that the process of her research project helped her get her present job by demonstrating writing and speaking skills. Previously, I believe she doubted her own abilities to do well. Perhaps this experience greatly increased her self-confidence and self-esteem."

• "I developed a class assignment that parallels a JPI special feature so that students could easily rewrite their papers for submission. One third of the students in one class chose to do the additional work and submit for review. All of these students benefited from outside one-on-one contact with a professor, improved their writing skills significantly, developed excitement for scholarly pursuits, and felt pride in their accomplishments."

There are many benefits to mentoring student scholarship outside the classroom. Facilitating student publications and presentations extends the idea of writing across the curriculum to writing outside the curriculum. As well as the pedagogical and personal advantages outlined previously, students may document their uncommon skills and accomplishments for prospective graduate or professional school admissions committees.

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Schapman, A. M. (1998). Tips for presenting a poster. Journal of Psychological Inquiry, 3, 53.

Smith, R. A. (1999). Views from an editor: Another perspective on publishing. Journal of Psychological Inquiry, 4, 51-53.

Smith, R. A., & Davis, S. F. (1997). The psychologist as detective. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wolverton, A. S. (1998). Establishing an ideal program of research. Journal of Psychological Inquiry, 3, 49-50.

Table 1

Information about Psychology Journals that Publish Undergraduate Students' Scholarly Work

Journal of Psychological Inquiry (JPI)

JPI Homepage: http://puffin.creighton.edu/psy/journal/JPIhome.html

Instructions for Contributors: http://puffin.creighton.edu/psy/journal/inscon.html

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Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research

Information: http://www.mercyhurst.edu/UPD/UPDdescriptions.htm#Psi Chi

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Journal of Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences (JPBS)

JPBS Homepage: http://alpha.fdu.edu/psychweb/JPBS.htm

Instructions for Contributors: http://alpha.fdu.edu/psychweb/Policy.htm#Policy

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